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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

31 July 1987

The Honorable Frank C. Carlucci
Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Frank,

This report is in response to the President's instruction in NSDD 266 to review the established procedures for producing national foreign intelligence estimates. These procedures were reviewed to determine if we were achieving our goal of maintaining the integrity and objectivity of the process and the products.

We believe the national intelligence estimates process does achieve objectivity in the many interagency products issued by the Intelligence Community. We find that there is integrity and independence on the part of the people and the process. Nonetheless, we have taken steps to reinforce the safeguards already built into the system. These include

-- reemphasized with the National Intelligence Officers their responsibilities to assist me in maintaining the integrity of the process

-- held special meetings with NFIB Principals and their representatives reviewing and reaffirming the requirements of objectivity, integrity, and quality of the estimates

-- initiated a revision of the Intelligence Community's guidelines for interagency production to bring currency and more clarity to the guidelines for process

-- made changes in the DCI role to assure myself that the independence of the intelligence process is maintained at several key points and to foster full discussion of national estimates by the members of the National Foreign Intelligence Board.

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The attached report lays out in greater detail the results of the review directed by the President. The review included solicitation of the views of each National Foreign Intelligence Board member on the issues of integrity and objectivity in the production of our national foreign intelligence estimates. The NFIB members provided thoughtful responses, including consideration of the relationships between their intelligence organizations and the policy community. These responses were included in the review conducted by the Chairman of the National Intelligence Council and the National Intelligence Officers who manage the interagency production on my behalf. The review also included a special session of the National Foreign Intelligence Board where the members discussed their views and recommendations for strengthening the independence of the intelligence process in order to preserve the integrity and independence of the product.

Sincerely yours,

Bill

William H. Webster

Enclosure



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# THE INTEGRITY AND OBJECTIVITY OF THE ESTIMATIVE PROCESS

## SUMMARY

We believe the current practices of the Intelligence Community do preserve the integrity, objectivity and independence of the process for the production of national foreign intelligence estimates. The integrity, quality, and objectivity of the personnel involved in estimative work is at least as important as the process itself. Some further changes in the DCI's role have been made to reinforce further the independence of the process. The guidelines for the process of interagency production are under NFIB and DCI review and will be republished.

The integrity of Estimates is safeguarded principally through:

-- Careful selection and orientation for each of the key people in the process.

-- The broadening of the scope of key policy questions to provide a context beyond that suggested by policymakers.

-- The exclusion of policymakers from the analytic and coordination process, ensuring Intelligence Community independence.

-- The participation by all elements of the Intelligence Community in the development and coordination of estimates from concept through final drafting.

-- The development of most likely and alternative outcomes in recognition of uncertainty on some evidence and the unpredictability of some events.

-- Explicit recognition in estimates of differing views within the Intelligence Community on particular judgments.

-- The right of any community member to explicity dissent from any or all parts of estimates.

-- Numerous levels of review within each Agency throughout the process.

-- The use of outside specialists and consultants for independent views on selected issues.



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-- Evaluation of completed estimates and feedback to the preparation of new ones as the cycle continues.

-- The ability of member agencies of the Intelligence Community to publish their own estimates and bring them to the attention of policymakers whenever they feel that a new line of analysis needs to be taken which may be at odds with the Intelligence Community's consensus views.

The independence of the estimative process from policymaker preference, however, is not an absolute end in itself but rather involves a number of trade-offs:

-- NIO's must maintain close contact with the policy community to ensure they are aware of US policy goals and the details of its implementation. Analysis conducted without knowledge of the US role on the international scene will inevitably be skewed.

-- There inevitably exist areas in which policy and intelligence cannot and should not be surgically separated--each has something to offer the other in insight; nearly all participants in both the policy and intelligence communities are engaged in some facet of the other's work at some time.

-- Senior review within the Intelligence Community should bring advantages of wisdom, experience and perspective to the analysis--but is also possibly open to the charge of "politicizing" analysis written at the working level.

-- Consensus cannot be allowed to eliminate sharpness of judgment.

-- Evidence can serve to buttress Community judgment, but the relative absence of evidence cannot be allowed to stifle creative insight where evidence may not be immediately available.

Recent changes in the DCI's role in the process should serve to reinforce further the objectivity of his key role:

-- The DCI will no longer approve draft estimates prior to coordination by NFIB representatives, but will review them to ensure that they conform to goals set in the Terms of Reference.

-- The DCI will no longer approve post-coordination drafts, but will bring his own comments and any suggestions for change to the NFIB table.

-- The DCI will seek the judgment and advice of NFIB members before deciding on the disposition of draft estimates.

Further, the DCI has directed the revision of the 1981 guidelines for interagency production in order to provide currency and clarity to this process.


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## DISCUSSION

1. As the President has stated, it is an important goal of the United States intelligence effort that the integrity and objectivity of the intelligence process be maintained, demanding critical differentiation between foreign intelligence and policy advocacy. This is a particularly important and sensitive goal as applied to the production of national estimates. It requires critical and constant attention especially by the Intelligence Community but also by the Policy Community. This must be considered side by side with another important goal, emphasized by the SSCI in a draft report last year, that the utility and relevance of the intelligence product be sustained, demanding cognizance of policy concerns in the production of foreign intelligence. This dual objective of assuring policy relevance while assuring against policy prescription makes two basic demands.

-- First, while input to the estimative process is to be sought from the Policy Community, it should be as to the questions asked, and not as to the answers provided. And the Policy Community should not be the only source of these questions.

-- Second, while the output of the estimative process should outline the general implications of the Intelligence Community's judgments for US interests, it should not cross the line to the advocacy of particular policy proposals. That must be deferred to the consumers in the Policy Community.

It should be recognized that the search for perfection in the estimative process inevitably involves a process of tradeoffs between faithful observance of the full bureaucratic process and the intellectual vigor of the final product. As more people and more opinions become involved, many of the sharp edges of insight can be lost; process can be observed but the product can be pallid, and the message to the policymaker can be unenlightening. The Intelligence Community must strive to strike a balance between often conflicting goals of timeliness and deliberation, between crispness of judgment and full consideration of alternative views, between safe consensus and boldness of insight, between policy relevance and policy neutrality.

2. The estimators must interact with policymakers, but maintain their independence from them. They must provide not only what the policymaker wants to know, but also what he needs to know. While the estimators need to focus on a policymaker's topic, they need to place it in proper context, which may well provide an estimate not anticipated by the policymaker. An estimate must examine the conventional wisdom on an issue, but also challenge it. Estimators must examine all the evidence on an issue, but, when evidence is lacking, they must not shrink from offering the insights the Community may nonetheless be able to offer. Complicating the process is



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the impact of US activity on the event to be analyzed while the outcome of an estimate may influence future choices of action. The estimators must assess both risks and opportunities for the US, and here they will march up to the fine line short of policy prescription. They owe it to their readers to engage in prediction, including which outcomes are most likely. But they owe it also to their readers to make their uncertainties clear and to provide alternative scenarios.

3. We have reviewed the national estimates process in terms of three basic elements--personnel, process, and products. This facilitates highlighting areas where vulnerabilities exist and safeguards help, especially noting where senior officers directly affect the process.

Personnel

4. The most critical element in ensuring the integrity and objectivity of the estimative process is people. Without individual integrity and objectivity at all levels, particularly at the top, no process will work; with it, nearly any process will be successful.

-- The National Intelligence Officer system is designed to select experienced, skilled officers who will manage the estimates process on behalf of the DCI. These NIOs are assigned to the Office of the DCI where they can be relatively free of pressures from the policy arms of government. The NIOs, selected from different parent agencies and backgrounds, also bring a variety of Intelligence Community perspectives to the estimates.

-- Additionally, Assistant NIOs, drafters, and Agency representatives--themselves representing different parent agencies and backgrounds--bring additional range of perspective to the analytic process. If the NFIB agencies fail to provide their best talent, the process will not provide the best product.

-- There are balances that each of these players must strike. The NIOs manage the production of estimates for the DCI and serve as guardians of the Community process. Drafters need to be able to utilize their agency background and at the same time rise above it and take on the community mantle. Representatives need to represent their agencies ably and responsibly, while being capable of setting aside parochialism in the interest of producing the best possible Community product.

-- And finally there are the intelligence principals, who need to be involved throughout the process, initially through their representatives and ultimately at the National Foreign Intelligence Board, to bring to bear their broader perspective and to help protect the intelligence process against undue policy pressures. A key to the success of this endeavor is the NIOs keeping the representatives informed, so that they in turn can keep their principals informed and involved.



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The Process

5. The Request for the Estimate. Any executive office can request an estimate, but most are generated by State, DoD, or NSC. The DCI also calls for estimates, as do other senior intelligence officers, although the greatest number of nominations come from the NIOs. The NIOs usually suggest that an Estimate be written because they have learned--from their contact with the policymakers and their knowledge of the intelligence--that such an estimate will be timely and relevant to a policy decision; sometimes one that has not yet captured the policymakers' attention.

-- The NIO is routinely in contact with other members of the Intelligence and Policy Community in his area of expertise. He needs to be well aware of current US policy to anticipate both the intelligence needs that the policy might spark as well as the foreign policy repercussions of prospective US action. Those contacts are a constant and common source of ideas for new estimates--a boon for policy relevance and legitimate support to the policy process, but carrying with it the danger of skewing production to topics formulated only to support, and not to illuminate, policy.

-- To guard against this, the NIOs, and other intelligence officials generate estimates where policy attention is needed, to tell the policymaker what the Intelligence Community feels the policymaker needs to hear, not necessarily what he wants to hear. And second, each request for an estimate is reviewed by the NIO with the Chairman of the National Intelligence Council and must be approved by the DCI. Disapproval is infrequent--never because of uncongeniality to the Policy Community--and only because of limited resources, conflicting priorities, or appropriateness--especially if a topic appears to be of a limited interest or too narrow or parochial in its focus for a national level estimate. The NFIB members' periodic review of the interagency production plan assures that they are well informed and can advise the DCI. The NIOs also maintain a continuing dialogue within the Intelligence Community and with the DCI to ensure that the production plan remains up to date and relevant.

6. Preparation and Coordination of TORs. In conjunction with the proposal for an estimate, the NIO presents a Concept Paper and Terms of Reference (TOR), drawing on suggestions from the Intelligence Community and the relevant policy people to define the scope and major themes of the estimate.

-- Usually the office requesting the estimate will set forth the main questions which it hopes to see answered. The NIO views any intelligence questions posed as legitimate and will respond to them. The NIO and his Intelligence Community colleagues will not necessarily limit the scope of a proposed estimate strictly to the questions and issues posed by the requester, however. Answering



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only those questions posed by the requester, without considering the broader context could give a misleading impression regarding policy implications.

-- The NIO maintains contact with the requester to insure that he understands the specific interests and purposes of the questions posed in an estimate, and to insure that the requester's intelligence needs are met. Although this is a practice long followed, it is worth noting that the SSCI in a September 1986 draft study also urged that NIOs remain in close contact with policymakers during the estimative process to ensure that relevant issues are addressed.

-- A critical part of the TOR is the Key Questions. This section sets forth the few central questions which the NIO believes to represent the heart of the intelligence problem.

-- The TOR also should clearly highlight the specific policy-related questions posed by the requester. Responses to these should also be highlighted in the estimate itself to catch policymaker attention.

-- The TOR also includes a retrospective look at previous estimates on the same subject. This process helps remind the Community of past discussions on the topic and provides opportunity for minority or alternative views to be tested against subsequent events.

-- The draft TOR also is seen by the Senior Review Panel (SRP) for its independent comment to the DCI and the NIO. The SRP is made up of retired senior diplomats, military officers, and scholars and reports directly to the DCI. Other independent DCI or NIO consultants or panels may also be asked to comment.

-- The NIO then will make changes in the Concept Paper/Terms of Reference as he believes are necessary. The TOR is then sent to the DCI with a cover memo indicating how informal Community inputs and SRP comments were or were not accommodated.

-- The DCI views the proper formulation of the TOR as a key element in developing a good estimate. Further, he uses the TOR as the first step in his personal supervision of the process to ensure objectivity and integrity of the product.

-- The Intelligence Community representatives then meet with the NIO to review the TOR, suggest changes for content, clarity, and comprehensiveness, and coordinate for their agencies. The revised TOR is sent to the DCI and Community principals as the formal, coordinated TOR for the Estimate.

-- This process of TOR review almost invariably adds to the scope of the paper. Rarely, if ever, are questions or issues dropped in the course of such review, except when deemed outside the purview of intelligence.



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7. The Drafting Process. The NIO will select a drafter for the estimate, from within the Intelligence Community. The drafter thereafter is responsible to the NIO for the estimate. The drafter seeks ideas and contributions from the Intelligence Community and outside experts as he develops the estimate.

-- The drafting process, however, is sometimes influenced by the drafter's parent organization biases. The drafter--whatever his parent organization--will usually submit his draft for review at least to his own immediate superior and possibly higher reviewing officials before the draft goes to the NIO. This is not always the case, and usually is prompted by a desire to improve the writing through peer review.

-- This review by the drafter's parent organization usually does contribute in terms of clarity, style and accuracy, but it also can affect the position taken by the drafter. In the real world, however, any drafter will be in part influenced by his own bureaucratic culture whether he undergoes his own in-house review or not.

-- The NIO will review the draft closely and critically. He has license to make any changes he feels are necessary in the interest of clarity, style, length, comprehensiveness, focus, sharpness and accuracy of judgment. Initial drafts often require extensive work to insure that they are terse and estimative in character. The NIO's changes in the draft reflect a balance of his own best substantive judgment and an awareness that he will have to coordinate the text with the Intelligence Community and that he has an obligation to reflect their significant views in the main or alternative text.

-- The draft estimate will then go to the SRP for independent review and comment. The NIO will accommodate as much of the SRP suggestions as he believes is appropriate. In most cases, SRP suggestions for change and improvement are incorporated. The revised draft is then sent to the DDCI and the DCI with a cover memo indicating how the SRP comments were accommodated. In a "fast track," this may occur after initial DCI review and simultaneous with informing the DCI and NFIB principals of the results of Community draft coordination.

-- DCI review at this point is intended primarily to ensure that the draft meets the goals set forth in the TOR and to ensure sharpness of judgment. The DCI may offer comment on substance as well but prefers to reserve his comments until after he has heard from the NFIB principals. Simultaneous with DCI review (this does not imply his approval yet), the paper is sent to NFIB representatives for review and staffing.

-- The NIO and the NFIB representatives take care throughout to ensure that the policy community should not have impact on the conclusions of the draft estimate. Policymakers do not attend the coordination process.



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8. Draft Coordination. The role of the NIO at the coordination meeting is a crucial one. He is responsible to the DCI to produce the best possible estimate he can along the lines agreed upon in the TOR, and is responsible to the Intelligence Community to assure that alternative views are adequately expressed.

-- The estimate must reflect the best Community judgments but must not be allowed to deteriorate into the "lowest common denominator" consensus. It must reflect important alternative views while avoiding the pitfalls of becoming a Christmas tree of endless possibilities that destroy clarity of the judgment.

-- The NIO cannot simply be an "honest broker" among contending parties; his role involves a greater degree of leadership--more akin to that of judge and manager who must ultimately arbitrate conflicts of view and serve as catalyst to ensure judgments are considered and far-reaching. The NIO must avoid foreclosure of debate or rejection of certain viewpoints by having recourse to statements such as "the DCI has special interest in this issue," or "the Secretary of _____ wants," which can serve to intimidate some representatives. The NIO should encourage expression from all representatives of the Community, avoiding dominance of the process by any one element or person.

-- Organizations and their representatives presenting dissenting viewpoints have a special obligation to present a coherent and significant alternative view that enriches the document--rather than simply noting dissent or blurring the judgment.

9. Final DCI Review. The DCI receives an information copy of the post-coordination draft as it is forwarded to all NFIB principals for review.

-- DCI comments or criticisms of the paper usually will be withheld until after full discussion at NFIB with the principals. This is a change from previous practice, in which DCI-proposed changes usually were inserted prior to NFIB. This change is meant to encourage a more free-flowing and active discussion of alternative views at NFIB.

10. Final Review in the Intelligence Community. Following distribution to NFIB principals, most agencies will submit the estimate to further in-house review. Certain problems can arise in the course of this process.

-- Some Intelligence Community working level representatives may not fully represent their agency and their principal at coordination meetings--because of unresolved differences within the agency, inability to get the view of the agency's principal, or lack of empowerment. As a result, a commitment by a working level representative at the pre-NFIB coordination meetings may not be


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supported by the NFIB principal, sometimes over lesser issues. Getting the NFIB principals into discussions at the table is a positive development in most cases, but sometimes the discussion is over issues that could have been more efficiently handled by effective representatives working with the NIO at pre-NFIB meetings.

-- Intelligence organizations attached to departments with policymaking responsibility face other complications. Their working level intelligence representatives sometimes commit their NFIB principal to an intelligence judgment in the estimate that is seen as unwelcome by the policy side of the department. This places a special responsibility on the heads of INR, DIA, and the Service intelligence organizations to insulate the intelligence process from undue policy influence.

-- For whatever reason, we find that even after completion of working level coordination and pre-NFIB distribution, representatives sometime report back to the NIO that new changes are being sought by their Agencies. This part of the process is vulnerable to charges of politicization. These issues can be resolved, however--pre-NFIB brokering for routine adjustments, and deferral to NFIB hearing for those of greater significance.

11. NFIB. The National Foreign Intelligence Board represents the final forum for adjudication of estimates. The DCI and the principals are free to propose changes in the work of the Community representatives. It falls to the DCI to stimulate discussion, to elicit explanations of disagreements, to accept footnotes or alternative language, or to remand the estimate for further work. The dissent procedure at NFIB is one of the important mechanisms available to ensure that each intelligence agency has an opportunity to express its views if they have not already been adequately reflected earlier. Finally, it is the DCI who approves the document.

12. After NFIB. The NIO and the drafter accommodate changes directed by the DCI as a result of NFIB deliberations. Usually, these changes will be coordinated only by the NFIB representatives but any agency can request further NFIB principal review depending on the nature of the changes.

13. Feedback. There is a feedback process that enables the DCI to determine customer satisfaction. The DCI meets frequently with his senior readers; the President and the Cabinet-level consumers. The NIOs meet with sub-cabinet consumers on a daily or weekly basis. The interaction of senior intelligence officers with intelligence consumers in the interagency meetings occurs on a daily basis. All of these contacts afford the DCI the opportunity to gauge consumer satisfaction with the product.

14. Competitive Analysis. While the community has no formal mechanism to force competitive analysis, it does in fact exist. In addition to the expression of alternative views in the estimates themselves, each agency in the Intelligence Community is free to--and usually does--provide its own


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in-house and contract studies and estimates which usually gain broad dissemination. These (sometimes) alternative views are brought to bear in coordination of National Intelligence Estimates or even after publication. These individual Agency studies keep competitive analysis available to policymakers.

15. The Problem of Evidence. Uncertainty needs to be clearly identified in the text whenever judgments are made that are based more on informed insight than abundant evidence. Appendices can buttress arguments for positions taken in the text but meager evidence also cannot be allowed automatically to bar a judgment. A judgment on an issue can sometimes be sustained by insight into and experience with an area even when intelligence is skimpy or ambiguous. This is especially true in areas involving clandestine or covert activity by another party. In short, the drafter and the Community likewise must not be so mesmerized by absence of indicators, or by a misplaced faith in the most likely outcomes that it leads to automatic rejection of judgments based on intuitive feel for behavior of the players. Thus, on the evidentiary problem the Community is called to walk a fine line between establishing a legal brief and accepting a position based on circumstantial evidence and intuition in the absence of any certain knowledge.

16. The Dilemma of Senior Level Review. The review of draft estimates by the DCI and NFIB principals and their suggestions for changes can evoke charges of politicization of the intelligence process. These individuals, and their subordinate senior managers in particular, are closer to the policy process than are the intelligence analysts who draft the estimates and they bring a different outlook to the intelligence process. Differing senses of international realities can be identified mistakenly as a politically partisan view. The benefit of senior level review of estimates is that it often brings to bear a broader view of the international order and the character of international conflict. These views inevitably influence the assessment of the likelihood of certain events. It is important for all parties involved to distinguish between a legitimate critique of a narrow, ill-formed or naive conception of politics or the international order, and the advocacy of preferred political views on how to deal with the nature of the international conflict. In short, the higher the level of generalization about how certain situations will evolve, the more one's own unspoken philosophical sense of how the world works is involved. Searching critiques of Community estimative views by senior officials need not represent "politicization" of the process. But, the senior reviewer must be careful that his critique is not in fact politically driven or broadly perceived by the Community as such.

## Products

17. Out of this process come four types of formal estimative products.

-- National Intelligence Estimates and Special National Intelligence Estimates, or NIEs and SNIEs, go through all steps of the process just outlined. As they bear the NFIB imprimatur and DCI signature, they have the greatest weight. As a general rule NIEs deal with broader subjects than SNIEs, deal with anticipated events, look


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further ahead, and more time is given to their preparation. The SNIE usually treats with unanticipated events, more narrow questions, and over a shorter period. SNIEs further differ from NIEs in that they go through some of the steps in parallel rather than in series, to expedite production of high priority and time-sensitive requirements, but they still involve the key players, the NFIB is still the final forum for adjudication, and the DCI is still the final approval authority.

-- Interagency Intelligence Memoranda and Interagency Intelligence Assessments, or IIMs and IIAs, differ from NIEs and SNIEs in that they are less estimative in nature and do not necessarily go through NFIB or bear the DCI's signature. But all agencies (in the case of IIAs at least all those with a substantive interest) still have the opportunity to coordinate, and agency representatives still have the opportunity to bring their principal's point of view to bear in the coordination process. Like the SNIEs, the IIAs go through some of their steps in parallel. Where the issues emerge as important enough, or the controversy surrounding them becomes great enough, IIMs in particular can be and sometimes are elevated to NFIB for consideration.

-- It should be noted that there are other intelligence products which the NIOs work with the Community to produce, which are not formal estimates and do not go through the formal coordination process. Key among these are warning products, generated by discussions at specially convened meetings between NIOs and Intelligence Community representatives and then produced by the NIOs on a particular issue, or combined by the NIO for Warning from all the NIOs for a global review. The former are done on an as needed basis; the latter are done monthly for the DCI and further distribution. These warning products reflect Community views, often make note of alternative views, but are not formally coordinated Community products.

-- Further, the NIO, as senior staff advisor to the DCI in his assigned area, fulfills a number of roles in which he does not have any responsibility to represent the Community. In these roles, such as producing talking points for DCI meetings or memos done as think pieces for the DCI or wider distribution to stimulate discussion, the NIO brings his own best judgment to bear. In these cases, it is imperative that he make explicit the fact that his views are his own, and he is not speaking on behalf of the Intelligence Community, even though his views will have been formed in the context of his interaction with that community.

18. In summary, the estimative process has some vulnerabilities in terms of meeting everyone's sense of objectivity and integrity, but it also contains many safeguards. These safeguards, consistently applied by all the players in the process, from drafters and agency representatives through NIOs and the NFIB principals, will provide the objectivity and integrity we seek. To summarize these safeguards, they are:



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- Careful selection and orientation for each of the key people in the process.
- The broadening of the scope of key policy questions to provide a context beyond that suggested by policymakers.
- The exclusion of policymakers from the analytic and coordination process, ensuring Intelligence Community independence.
- The participation by all elements of the Intelligence Community in the development and coordination of estimates from concept through final drafting.
- The development of most likely and alternative outcomes in recognition of uncertainty on some evidence and the unpredictability of some events.
- Explicit recognition in estimates of differing views within the Intelligence Community on particular judgments.
- The right of any community member to explicitly dissent from any or all parts of estimates.
- Numerous levels of review within each Agency throughout the process.
- The use of outside specialists and consultants for independent views on selected issues.
- Evaluation of completed estimates and feedback to the preparation of new ones as the cycle continues.
- The ability of member agencies of the Intelligence Community to publish their own estimates and bring them to the attention of policymakers whenever they feel that a new line of analysis needs to be taken which may be at odds with the Intelligence Community's consensus views.
- The DCI reviews the estimate at key points in its development to ensure that the integrity and objectivity of the process is maintained.



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